

# The Politics of Form of the Hassidic Tale

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**ABSTRACT:** The main task of this article is to outline a framework of a theory of the politics of the literary form of the Hassidic tale. The point of departure of this theory is that the basic literary form of the Hassidic tale is a narrative of the accomplishment of a magic act that is conducted by the Tzaddik, the spiritual and political leader of the Hassidic community. The literary form of the tale is the main power creating the materialistic magic act. This is the reason why the political effect of the magic act represented in the tale is a product of the tale's form. The political effect of the tale is created by the way the tale is received by the Maskilic reader. As a religious person he makes a very sharp distinction between his acceptance of the authority of God and his rejection of the political theology that provides the Tzaddik with his political sovereignty. The Maskilic political response is based on the rejection of the Hassidic deep belief in the spiritual connection between God and the magic acts of the Tzaddik. The Maskilim despised the magic acts performed by the Tzaddik. As a matter of fact, the Maskilic repudiation of the Hassidic tale, which produces by its narrative form the Tzaddik's magical act, creates for the Maskilic addressee the political act of the tale's form.

גם היה מעשה שהיו צריכים לגשם מאד והיו הנכרים מוציאים פסיליהם  
סביב הכפר כידוע נמוסם ולא ירד הגשם פעם אחת אמר הבעש"ט להמוכסן  
תשלח להסביבה שיבאו לכאן למנין וגזר תענית והבעש"ט התפלל בעצמו  
לפני התיבה והאריכו בתפילה ושאל נכרי אחד מה התפללתם היום באריכות  
וגם היתה בכיה גדולה ביניכם והשיב לו האמת שהתפללנו על הגשם ולצץ  
הנכרי מאד באמרו הם הלכו עם פסיליהם ולא הועילו ומה תועילו  
בתפילתכם וסיפר המוכסן דברי הנכרי להבעש"ט ואמר לו כך אמור להנכרי  
שהיום יהיה גשם וכן היה.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Karl-Erich Grözinger, ed., *Die Geschichten vom Ba'al Schem Tov (Shivche ha-Bescht)*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), vol. 1 (Hn. 36), 33–34.

There was also an occurrence [tale] when there was no rain. The gentiles took out their idols and carried them around the village, according to their custom, but it did not rain. Once the Besht said to the tax collector: “Send for the Jews in the surrounding area to come here for a minyan [the quorum of ten Jewish adult men required for holding liturgical services].” And he proclaimed a fast. The Besht himself prayed before the ark, and the Jews prolonged the prayer. One gentile asked: “Why did you remain at prayer so long today? And why was there a great cry among you?” The tax collector said that the truth is that they prayed for rain—and the gentile mocked him sharply, saying, “We went around with our idols and it did not help. What help will you bring with your prayers?” The tax collector told the words of the gentile to the Besht, who said to him, “Tell the gentile that it will rain today.” **And so it did.**<sup>2</sup>

**T**HIS TALE, TITLED “The Besht’s Prayer Produces Rain” by the later editors, is a typical Hassidic tale. The Hassidic tale is one of the literary genres that developed within the framework of the Hassidic movement, a Jewish mystical-pietist movement founded in the second half of the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe. The movement’s first major figure, Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer (1668–1760), was the ultimate Tzaddik, the righteous man, and was called the Besht, which is an acronym created from the title Ba’al Shem Tov. Hassidic homilies and tales, which were delivered orally by the Tzaddik, the leader and spiritual guide of the Hassidic movement, to the community of believers, also included narrative texts. The first Hassidic book, *Sefer toldot Yaakov Yosef* by Jacob Joseph Ha-Cohen of Polonoy, included both sermons and stories as well and was published in Koretz in 1780.

Books dedicated solely to Hassidic tales began to be published only at the start of the nineteenth century. In 1814 *In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov* (Shivhei ha-Besht) was published in Hebrew in Koyps (and in Yiddish in Ostrahah in 1815). “The Besht’s Prayer Produces Rain” appears in this collection, which also includes texts of Hassidic hagiography, concentrated on the figure of the Besht, that is to say, stories *about* the Tzaddik. *In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov* was preceded by other examples of Jewish hagiographical literature (*sifrut hashvachim*), such as *Shivhei ha’ari* (1803), about the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed. In 1815 (in Ostrahah), *The Book of Tales* (*Sippurei ma’asiyot*), by the Besht’s great-grandson Rabbi Nachman of Braslav (1772–1810), was published; it included thirteen tales that were told orally by the Tzaddik in Yiddish, that is to say, stories of the Tzaddik, and were taken down and translated into Hebrew by Rabbi Nachman’s student and scribe, Rabbi Nathan of Sternhartz (or Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov) (1780–1844).

The Hassidic tale usually tells of a magical act, a miracle, or an act of revelation performed by the Tzaddik (Ba’al Shem in the tradition of the Jewish Ba’alei Shem) because of the special powers he has, thanks to his strong connection with God.<sup>3</sup> Usually, one figure or the entire Hassidic community is rescued from distress and attains a solution to its troubles due to the Tzaddik’s intervention into reality.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Ben Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, eds., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov (Shivhei ha-Besht)*, trans. Dan Ben Amos and Jerome R. Mintz (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991), 35–36 (translation slightly modified—H. H.).

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 7–78; and Gedaliah Nigal, *The Hassidic Tale* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 77–85.

A tale is a narrative, which is defined, for example, by Barbara Herrnstein-Smith as “verbal acts consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened.”<sup>4</sup> At play here are at least two events connected, in most cases, through a relationship of cause and effect. In the Hassidic tale, we are told about a wonder, a miracle, or a revelation, in which divine intervention into human reality propels the movement from cause to effect. According to Vladimir Propp’s morphology of the folktale, the point of departure of the form of the folktale is in many cases a lack (e.g., there is no rain), which moves forward (via, e.g., prayer) toward a denouement (rain-fall).<sup>5</sup> This definition can be followed by pointing to the function of the Besht and his minyan of supplicants as “magical agents,” a device that “is usually placed in the middle of the folktale.”<sup>6</sup>

By this we can say that the prayer as a magic act is specified in the tale by emphasizing the personal and central role of the Besht himself as the concrete magician. He makes this specific magical prayer unique by proclaiming a fast and by the fact that he “himself prayed before the ark, and the Jews prolonged the prayer.” The uniqueness of the event as a magic act that is performed in the general public sphere is made even clearer when the “gentile asked: ‘Why did you remain at prayer so long today? And why was there a great cry among you?’”

The Hassidic tale’s act of storytelling is itself a real event of the Hassidic world’s discourse: the telling of the tale is a ritual, which tells about a miracle that changed the order of nature, which is exemplified in our tale in using praying to bring rainfall. As a matter of fact, the tale itself is a ritual that imbues Hassidism with magical powers similar to the power of an amulet, incantation, prayer, or practical Kabbalah. The tale is itself a sacred act, a magic act in itself, a corporeal entity that is also a representation of a magical prayer,<sup>7</sup> which tells the occurrence of a miracle. Since “It is true that magicians perform ritual which is akin to religious prayers and sacrifice,”<sup>8</sup> we can characterize the prayer as magic. Such a connection between prayer and magic can be found in *Amtahat Binyamin*, a book of magic practices by R. Binyamin Binush (printed in 1716) that contains directions for purification and moral improvement, methods for dealing with the maladies of the body and the soul, and also prayers that are classed as magic.<sup>9</sup>

The very magical act of Hassidic storytelling was represented in Hassidism as what was defined by *In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov* as a study of Ma’aseh Merkavah (Divine Chariot), or as an instrument of returning the soul of the Tzaddik from its ecstasy while bringing with it the presence of the divine.<sup>10</sup>

The miracle performed by the Tzaddik allows him, despite the irregular circumstances, to keep the Jewish law or, in many cases, to save a Jew or the Jewish community from a disaster, sickness, or death. The miracle results from a human action that puts into effect immanent divine powers that change the concrete, visible reality. The form of this narrative generates a “rhetoric of the real.”<sup>11</sup> It is important to stress that I am not discussing the Hassidic tale here as an ahistorical genre with a stable form. The reality of the immanence of God in a concrete situation is

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 228.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino, 2015), 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 85; see also 40–41.

<sup>7</sup> Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 149–80.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 2001), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Etkes, *The Besht*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Idel, *Hasidism*, 185–88.

<sup>11</sup> Porter H. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42–45.

responsible for the fact that the two events, one following the other, are indeed structured formally as a material cause and effect.

This is the formal core of the Hassidic tale, and the political effect of this form is derived first and foremost from the refusal of the addressee of the tale to accept as obvious the ontological status, as a reality initiated by the concrete Tzaddik, of the transition from the real event of the cause to the effect as a real event.

Beyond the ethics of the Hassidic tale<sup>12</sup> stands its political action. When discussing the political effect of the Hassidic tale, it is very important to claim that the act of storytelling of the Hassidic tale, which is performed as a narrative form that connects two events as cause and effect, is a concrete political act in the world, which is based on the Hassidic tale's ontology that, drawing upon Kabbalah literature and immanent deity,<sup>13</sup> has a gnostic character in which the opposition between good and evil, between pure and impure,<sup>14</sup> appears as a power relationship between real entities. So, the evil that is represented in the Hassidic tale is not a product of a mistake in reasoning but appears as a piece of reality.

Thus, while telling the hagiographic tale "The Besht's Prayer Produces Rain," the storyteller is in awe of the tremendous power of the Besht's prayer to change the laws of nature and to bring about rainfall. The tale is an act of defiance in the face of the Christians, and its direct addressees are the members of the Hassidic community, whose faith is strengthened by the Besht's power to get God to bring about rain and end the drought, the common problem for the Jews and the Christians alike.

The Christian and the Hassidic communities share in this story a common public sphere, within which the political inferiority of the Hassidic community is evident. This is clear from the gentile's teasing of the Jewish tax collector who mediates between the Jewish community and the common public domain: "And why was there a great cry among you?" The very act of telling the story is a political act that serves the interests that derive from the Jewish exodus from the ghetto in modernity, which entailed the Jewish political existence in the Christian European public sphere. The tale assumes the common public sphere of Jews and gentiles by stating their common wish for rain that will fall on both. The Hassidic politics pushes forward the Hassidic community as an active presence in the modern European public sphere—the very same sphere in which, in contrast to the universalistic ideology of the European Enlightenment, the gentiles' empire conducted toward the Hassidim an oppressive colonialism.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the Hassidic politics of survival as Jews in the empire, the Maskilic politics for solving the European "Jewish Question" (*die juden Frage*) was a politics of Jewish integration in the empire by trying to achieve the goal of emancipation and citizen rights.

At this historical moment, the early nineteenth century, the Hebrew Maskilic movement, which began in late eighteenth-century Prussia with the Hebrew journal *Hameasef* (1783), was still in its very early stages in Galicia (part of the Hapsburg Empire) and had not arrived yet in Russia and Poland. But its political and ideological influence already existed in Eastern Europe as an outcome of the invasions of Napoleon, who brought with him the Enlightened spirits of

<sup>12</sup> See Tsippi Kauffman, "The Hasidic Story: A Call for Narrative Religiosity," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 22 (2014): 101–26.

<sup>13</sup> Mendel Piekartz, *Hasidut Braslav* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1995), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Yoav Elstein, *Ma'aseh hoshev: Studies in Hasidic Tale* (Tel Aviv: Eked, 1983), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

the French Revolution. An example of the presence of Western European Jewish Haskalah in late eighteenth-century Eastern Europe was the return of the Polish Maskil Mendel Lefin of Satanow (1749–1826) to Poland after he had spent four years in Berlin, where he met Moses Mendelssohn. Lefin in 1791 and, like him, the Maskil Jacques Calmanson in 1797 complained about the presence of Hassidism in Poland and warned the Jewish people about what they saw as the harmful Tzaddikim.<sup>16</sup> Add to this the fact that already in 1809 Rabbi Nachman of Braslav told the tale “The Clever Man and the Simple Man,” which imagined the confrontation between the Haskalah and Hassidism in the political context of the European states. There is no question that “[i]n the case of *Shivhei ha-Besht*, it must be made explicit that the material took its current form in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and reflects the concerns and the circumstances of the people who created it and for whom it was created at that time.”<sup>17</sup> But what appears no less important is the fact that while dealing with the political effect of a Hassidic tale that was first published in 1815, we should take into account its republications, as its later dissemination exposed it to a Maskilic political response. A typical example of such a response is the harsh Maskilic satiric attack on the magical aspects of *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* in Joseph Perl's *Revealer of Secrets (Megale temirin)* from 1819.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Mitnagdim, the rabbinic Jews who fought against Hassidism, were also a potential political addressee of the Hassidic tale, the discussion here will be confined to the Hassidic tale's political act toward the Maskilic reader. The Maskilim were imagined and perceived by the Hassidim as the emissaries of the empire in the name of the Enlightenment (the metonymy of the gentile in the tale), which later in fact oppressed the Hassidim by brutally intruding into the particularistic and diasporic Jewish existence.<sup>19</sup> In their response to this imagined threat of the empire's colonialism, the Hassidim made efforts to defend themselves and to survive in the empire as a Jewish political community. As a matter of fact, the Hassidim practiced their own sovereignty as autonomous communities (*kehilot*) while the Hassidic Court ruled by the Tzaddik behaved like “a State within a State.”<sup>20</sup>

For that matter the Hassidic tale served to resist the colonialism of the empire and the Haskalah in ways that have been described by scholars of folklore and literature who follow the theoretical paths that were paved by Antonio Gramsci and Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>21</sup>

Following Walter Benjamin's essay on the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Leskov as a storyteller for whom the tale is an act of sharing private, collective, and popular

<sup>16</sup> Gleen Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 153.

<sup>18</sup> Etkes, *The Besht*, 259–60.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> David Assaf, “‘Medina ktana betoch medina gedola’: Hahazer hamalhutit ve-yoshveya” [“Like a small state in a big state”: The royal court and its inhabitants], in *Tzadik and eda: Hebetim historim ve-hevratin be-heker ha-hasidut* [Tzaddik and congregation: Historical and social aspects in the research of Hassidism] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 2001), 398–421.

<sup>21</sup> Cristine Bacchilega, “Folklore and Literature,” in *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. Regina F. Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 447–63.

experiences by creating an intimate community of readers,<sup>22</sup> it could be said that the Hassidic tale contributes to the establishment of an intimate community of listeners who congregate in its light.

This narrative situation creating the politics of the form of the Hassidic tale can be described by Jacques Rancière's insight that "[p]olitics is often confused with the exercise of power and the struggle for power. But it is not enough that there will be laws of regulation specific of collective life. What is needed is configuration of a specific form of community. Politics is the construction of a specific sphere of experience in which certain objects are posited as shared and certain subjects regarded as capable of designating these objects and of arguing about them."<sup>23</sup>

Following Carl Schmitt,<sup>24</sup> we can assert that the act of telling these tales is a response to and also a declaration of the acute Jewish state of emergency in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>25</sup> This declaration of the state of emergency by the Besht as the Tzaddik who proclaims a fast constitutes the political theology of the Hassidic community that establishes God as its sovereign and the Tzaddik as its representative. The Tzaddik "became an intermediary between God and man,"<sup>26</sup> and for Rabi Elimelekh of Lizensk (1717–87), who put a lot of emphasis on the prayer of the Tzaddik, "It is now the Zaddik's responsibility to bring down the flow of divine grace and God is *absolved* from this responsibility!"<sup>27</sup> So it happens that the Tzaddik who fulfills his responsibility to the community by praying and by telling tales is also the authority who declares and also challenges the modern Jewish state of emergency. The Besht's proclamation of the fast and the prolonging of the prayer signify the difference between the Hassidic movement and other Jewish people. The Maskilim as well as the Mitnagdim practiced and believed in the Jewish religion,<sup>28</sup> whereas the Hassidim distinguished themselves by what Mauss defines as the "irreligiosity of magic rites" from the Jewish religion, which is "always predictable, prescribed and official."<sup>29</sup>

This political meaning of Hassidic literature leads us to see it as a reaction to the collapse of the institution of the "Kahal," the autonomous rule of the Jews, that was brought about by modernity. The Hassidic community was forced to deal with their contacts with the European public sphere, even as they forcefully defended the boundaries of their own particular public sphere (the Hassidic Court) against the intrusive acculturation that was conducted by the Russian and the Hapsburg Empires.

And indeed, from the moment the Hassidic tales, which originally were told orally, were printed and widely disseminated, they took part in the general European public sphere. The political action of telling the Hassidic tale was also directed towards the image of the Haskalah movement as a political addressee.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968), 115–45.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Jacob, *The Hasidic Prayer* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 132.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent survey and analysis see: David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Mauss, *General Theory of Magic*, 29.



The Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, originated in Berlin at the end of the eighteenth century, and through the nineteenth century, it spread throughout Eastern Europe and even outside it. The Maskilim advocated Enlightenment principles, rationalism, and the improvement and modernization of the Jew, and they were known for their strong affinity to colonial European languages, literatures, and philosophy. The Maskilim were perceived as attacking and criticizing the Hassidim as delusionary dreamers who rejected the project of European Jewish modernization. By the way, by adopting this belief, the Hassidim refused the political possibilities of the Haskalah, which present-day scholars of the Haskalah describe as a critical Romantic stance toward the European Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> The Hassidim rejected the political option that they believed was offered by the Maskilim, and they opposed the idea that the Haskalah and the gentiles would resolve the Jewish state of emergency in the European public sphere; in the tale, remember, the gentiles failed to bring the rainfall not only for themselves but for the Jews as well.

The Maskilim were perceived by Hassidism as joining the efforts of the European empires to educate and to civilize the “savage,” provincial, “primitive” Hassidim. The main attitude of the Maskilim defined the Hassidim as abject and was a response to their superstitions, their anachronistic clothing, their lack of hygiene, their moral corruption, criminality (as smugglers), and even promiscuity. As was mentioned above, the most brilliant literary expression of this Maskilic attitude can be found in Joseph Perl’s satirical parody *Revealer of Secrets* (1819), which was published very soon after the first two collections of Hassidic tales appeared.

A project of internal colonialism conducted by the European empires with the collaboration of the Maskilim in the name of Enlightenment values intended to make the Hassidic community conform to the norms of the European public sphere. The Maskilim, who, in most cases, were themselves religious Jews, thus denied the structural contradiction of the presence of Jews in a Christian public space, for example, by promoting the idea of tolerance espoused by Moses Mendelssohn, the father of the Jewish Haskalah in the late eighteenth century. Later, in the nineteenth century, they adopted a slogan, coined by the major Hebrew Maskilic poet Yehuda Leib Gordon (1830–92), that distinguished the Jewish private sphere from the general public sphere: “Be a man in the streets and a Jew at home.” The origin of this spatial distinction is Naphtali Hirtz Wessely’s *Words of Peace and Truth* (*Divre shalom ve-emet*, 1782), where he made, as an observant Jew, what was perceived by the angry rabbis as an outrageous distinction between the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the nonreligious human being. Basically, Wessely made a distinction between Jewish religious space and European space, which was portrayed by him as neutral from a religious point of view.

The Hassidim, in contrast, maintained that the European public sphere was not religiously neutral but, rather, Christian, and they therefore perceived the Maskilic Europeanization of Jewish culture a process of religious assimilation. This was also a theological response to the theological dimension of impurity of the abject Maskilic response to them.<sup>31</sup>

So, when the Hassidim act in the common European public sphere that includes them and the gentiles together, they promote the rainfall on all the inhabitants, Jews and gentiles alike, as a challenge to and in defiance of the idea of neutrality of the general public sphere. The act of the

<sup>30</sup> Olga Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012); and Banbaji Amir, “The Literary Character of the Haskalah,” review of *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism*, by Olga Litvak, *Contemporary Studies in Judaism* 29 (forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Besht praying challenges the gentiles, whose practice of their religion, which is portrayed in the tale as a kind of paganism, failed to bring the rainfall. This opposition in the tale is portrayed as a struggle between Jewish effective magic and the false and ineffective magic of the gentiles.

This Hassidic stance against the imagined Maskilic support for the Europeanization of the public sphere shared by Christians and Jews manifests itself in the tale as a Jewish defiance against the failure of the gentiles to make it rain through their Christian idolatry. This is an expression of the politics directed by the Hassidic community at the empires' sovereigns, as well as at the Maskilim, the Jewish emissaries of the Christian empire. The Hassidim denounced reading Maskilic books, and they particularly despised the *Biur* commentary of the Torah that was written by Moses Mendelssohn and his followers.<sup>32</sup>

The Hassidim practiced a politics of survival by means of which they sought to find a haven within the domain of the internal sovereignty of the community of the Hassidic Court (Hatzer) and to avoid, as much as possible, the violent invasion into their lives of the Christian Russian Empire and their Jewish Maskilic emissaries. In opposition to the political theology of the Haskalah, which relied on the Christian state and the imposition of the colonial languages and European habits, the Hassidic community established a Jewish political theology of internal sovereignty that was antistatehood and nonnationalist and a face-to-face community that resisted the Andersonian national imagined community. It can even be described as an anarchist community (which fascinated Martin Buber),<sup>33</sup> which was ruled by God, with the Tzaddik as his representative.

This kind of sovereignty of the Hassidic Court as a haven of theocracy was based on a pre-modern political theology. The Hassidic political theology differs from Schmittian statist political theology since its response to the Jewish state of emergency has been far from a decisive declaration of it by the sovereign of the state.<sup>34</sup>

As is typical of political theology, it reflects a religious crisis,<sup>35</sup> which can help to explain the theological response to the messianic and later heretic Shabtai Zvi crisis that erupted in the Jewish world in the seventeenth century. The Hassidic Court was created as an alternative theopolitical format of the dissolved Jewish "Kahal" that was ruled by the rabbis. And, as an integral phenomenon of this Hassidic political community, the Jewish premodern act of praying is revealed in the tale about the Besht as the most effective vehicle to transform nature.

If we transfer the work of Bruno Latour in his book *We Have Never Been Modern* to the Jewish context,<sup>36</sup> it can be said that the definition of the Hassidic tale as a premodern phenomenon is a discursive categorization that sets modernism as an ideology against the Hassidic tales. But in fact what we have here with the political interpretation of the Hassidic tale is a fluctuation between a premodern and a modern reading. This is a fluctuation between the printed or adapted Hassidic tale, disconnected from the subject telling it and perceived as modern fiction, and a premodern reading, which includes a moment of revelation of an unmediated linkage between

<sup>32</sup> Nigal, *Hasidic Tale*, 97–98.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Horizon Press, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*.

<sup>35</sup> Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Political Theology and Early Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Yehuda Shenhav, "Modernity and the Hybridization of Nationalism and Religion: Zionism and the Jews of the Middle East as a Heuristic Case," *Theory and Society* 36, no. 1 (2007): 1–30.



signifier and signified that renders the Hassidic text absolute truth. It is important to point out here how many Hassidic tales make an effort to establish their trustworthiness as documents of what really happened, in contrast to the fictionality of Haskalah Hebrew literature.<sup>37</sup>

What we have in front of us is a constructed cultural contact between premodernity and modernity that is presented in the modern public sphere by disseminating printed matter. This is a political contact between the oral and the printed texts that constructs the Maskilic reader as a major agent who received the form of the Hassidic tale as a political act. An obvious sign of this responsiveness of the Hassidic tale to its imagined Maskilic reader is that the magic act performed by the Besht was a prayer, which the Hassidic narrator hopes will convey to the Maskil that the Besht performed legitimate “white magic.” This kind of Hassidic apologetic stance that distinguishes between magic and prayer reflects the change in the status of the magician in late eighteenth-century Jewish society. This change led Nahum of Chernobyl, a Besht follower, to portray him in 1798 as a healer who prays and never practices magic with amulets.<sup>38</sup>

A symptomatic reading of the Hassidic narrative reads it as an expression, or symptom, of the real conditions from which it emerged, which the implied author will want to hide and therefore will probably disagree with a reader who exposes those conditions through a symptomatic reading. What the implied author will not disagree with is that the form of the Hassidic tale is constructed by reasoning “post hoc ergo propter hoc” (after this, therefore because of this), and that by inferring the materialistic result from the materialistic cause and interpreting the result as magic, the form of the tale reveals the fact that the magic act is conducted because of an aesthetic and formal reason.

Before elaborating this point about the decisive power of the literary form, it must be added that the disagreement of the implied author with the symptomatic reading is actually the explicit agreement of the implied author with the real writer, that is, of the paratextual entity that forms the implied author and that is itself the oral storyteller who embodies in his material body the speech and that in itself is the material and real magical act of godly holiness.

The magical act is a tropological act that creates by the narrative form a “rhetoric of the real.”<sup>39</sup> This truth of the real is clear since “the tax collector said that *the truth* [emphasis added] is that they prayed for rain” (והשיב לו האמת שהתפללנו על הגשם). This is a nonfictional rhetoric of reality of the immanent God, which is, by its presence, responsible for the magical connection between the causal act and its result.

This lack of fictionality of the Hassidic tale has already been pointed out by Georg Lukács, before he wrote his brilliant work *The Theory of the Novel* (1916) and before he turned to Marxism in 1918 and became a central voice in Western Marxism and in Marxist aesthetics. In his early days, the Jewish Lukács was even interested in Jewish mysticism, and in 1911 he received from Martin Buber the two Hassidic books that Buber published in German at the turn of the twentieth century: *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*<sup>40</sup> and *The Legends of Baal-Shem*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Eli Yassif, *Sippur ha-am ha-Ivry* [The Hebrew Folktale] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, Ben Gurion University Press, 1999), 404–6, 432.

<sup>38</sup> Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 134–35.

<sup>39</sup> Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 42–45.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, trans. M. Friedman (1906; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Martin Buber, *The Legends of the Baal-Shem*, trans. Maurice Friedman (1907; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955).

In 1911 Lukács corresponded with Buber and eventually he even published an essay on Buber's work on Hassidism, in which he wrote about the Hassidic tale ("Baalschem's mystical interpretation") "that the mystical way of thinking proves to be the most homogenous one in the history of mankind, notwithstanding the fact that it is the most individual, the least scientific, and therefore the *least verifiable* mode of thinking."<sup>42</sup> This is similar to what Lukács wrote as an Hegelian idealist about the lack of fictionality of the genre of the essay in his book *Soul and Form* (1910) in a quite close way to the idea of the Greek myth, which, according to Talal Asad, "never means a symbolic story that has to be deciphered—or for that matter, a false one."<sup>43</sup>

In their correspondence Buber wrote to Lukács (December 3, 1911) that "I cannot keep it from you—and I hope that your feelings for the work will not be negatively affected"—but he should be aware that in what he reads in Buber's Hassidic collection of the Ba'al Shem Tov, "the innermost motifs alone are 'authentic.'"<sup>44</sup> In his answer to Buber (December 20, 1911) Lukács mentioned the irrelevancy of this fact for him: "My initial impression is in no way affected by the fact that the Ba'alschem legends are not 'authentic,' and I quite understand your position as not only possible but as a necessary one."<sup>45</sup>

By this Lukács basically expressed his belief that the authenticity of the Hassidic tale does not lend itself to verification on the scientific basis of external facts. The implication of his response is that, following the mythic, nonmimetic truth he found at that time in the literary genre of the essay,<sup>46</sup> the truth of the Hassidic tale does not rely on facts which are external to the process of the Hegelian synthesis of the storytelling Subject and the Object of the tale. This moment of synthesis is the peak of the manufacturing of the concrete, true reality, which according to Hegelian idealism is the peak of rational abstraction. Lukács followed in the footsteps of Hegel, and through Hegel's *Science of Logic* he transformed "this purely logical distinction into an ontological one"<sup>47</sup> and therefore pointed in his *Theory of the Novel*<sup>48</sup> to the essence of the Greek epic as immanent in life and as enabling the epic narrative form as a result of life's being meaningful and given to complete understanding.

Lukács's response to Buber's Hassidism can be connected to the fact that during this time early in his career as a literary critic he was involved with mysticism and messianism. Therefore, his concept of the form of the essay in *Form and Soul* as a mystical expression can explain his enthusiastic response to the Hassidic tale. In "On the Form and the Nature of the Essay," the opening essay of *Soul and Form*, Lukács writes:

The critic's moment of destiny, therefore, is that moment at which things become forms—the moment when all feelings and experiences on the near or the far side of form receive form, are melted down and condensed into form. It is the mystical moment of union between the outer and the inner, between soul and form. It is as mystical as the moment of destiny in tragedy when the hero meets his destiny, in the short story when accident and cosmic necessity converge,

<sup>42</sup> Georg Lukács, "Jewish Mysticism" (1911), in *Georg Lukács and Thomas Mann: A Study in the Sociology of Literature*, ed. Judith Marcus (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 160 (emphasis added).

<sup>43</sup> Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Georg Lukács: Selected Correspondence, 1902–1920*, ed. Judith Marcus and Zoltán Tat (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 176.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>46</sup> Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostok (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 26–28.

<sup>47</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 163.

<sup>48</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

in poetry when the soul and its world meet and coalesce into a new unity that can no more be divided, either in the past or in the future.<sup>49</sup>

The politics of the Hassidic tale is based on not being fictional but rather a true story told orally and reproduced by the “writer” and printer, who merge the tale’s internal narrator with the tale’s external storyteller and both of them with the story itself.

Trying to speak about the truth of the Hassidic tale forces us to conclude, following Regina Bendix,<sup>50</sup> that the reception of the Hassidic tale as an authentic product of Hassidism is a constructed modernist reception of a recovered Hassidic “essence” that has been lost because of modernity. Buber and Lukács have perceived and constructed the Hassidic tale as a modernist text, a trend that was very popular at that time among other modernist Jewish writers, such as Micha Yosef Berdichevski, Yehuda Steinberg, S. Y. Agnon, and Y. L. Peretz.<sup>51</sup>

But although Lukács’s and Buber’s insights can be very fruitful for analyzing the politics of the Hassidic tale form, we should be very cautious not to portray the Hassidic tale itself as a modernist literature (like the fashionable way of defining Rabbi Nachman of Braslav as a modernist) and instead concentrate on it as conducting a politics of survival in the modern (not modernist) Jewish scene of printed modern literary texts.

In his *Allegories of Reading* Paul de Man concludes in a counterintuitive way that instead of the common wisdom that we create the key for the purpose of opening the lock, what we really have is “that a lock (and a secret room or box behind it) had to be invented in order to give a function to the key.”<sup>52</sup> For de Man the key is the rhetoric, the intersubjective language, the writing, the text, and the form, which escape the control of the self. This is the reason why de Man’s example of the key that creates the lock means that it is the self, the lock, which is designed and controlled by the rhetoric, the key: “Rhetoric all too easily appears as the tool of the self, hence its pervading association, in the everyday use of the term, with persuasion, eloquence, the manipulation of the self and of others.”<sup>53</sup>

Following de Man we can say that the narrative form, the signifying structure of the Hassidic tale, is responsible for the revealing of the magic (the “secret room or box behind it”) by the act of the Tzaddik, who creates the materialistic theological content of the tale. It is not the given magic content of the tale that is designed by its form, but it is the rhetoric, the form of the Hassidic tale, that creates the magic act as the materialistic signified of the tale which is a product of the form of the magic’s revelation. It is not the very act of the self of the Hassidic storyteller who generates the rhetoric, that is to say, the form of the Hassidic tale. It is the form of the tale that generate the self who performs the tale as a magic act which itself represents the magic act of the prayer of the Besht that brings the rain.

<sup>49</sup> Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 23–24.

<sup>50</sup> Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Martina Urban, *Aesthetics of Renewal: Martin Buber’s Early Representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Nicham Ross, *Masoret ahuva vesnua* [Loved and Hated Tradition] (Sde Boker: Ben Gurion University Press, 2010); and Hannan Hever, *Bekoach ha-El, teologia vepolitika basifrut ha-Ivrit ha-modernit* [With the Power of God, Theology and Politics in Modern Hebrew Literature] (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuhad, Van Leer Institute, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 173.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–73.

Following Derrida we can state that the “authentic” oral Hassidic text exists, even before printing, as a written text: “If writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, it should be possible to say that all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general. No reality or concept would therefore correspond to the expression ‘society without writing.’”<sup>54</sup>

The denial of writing by Rousseau, who preferred speech instead, is “profoundly underlying this philosophy of writing [and] is therefore the image of a community immediately present to itself, without difference, a community of speech where all the members are within earshot.”<sup>55</sup> But “to recognize writing in speech, that is to say *différance* and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, *différance*, writing”<sup>56</sup> of the formal structure of the language of the tale. What we can deduce from this is that the Maskilic political reading of the Hassidic tale is a reading of a written form which “the ultimate denunciation can no longer do without the active intervention of the foreigner,” for example, the ethnographer.<sup>57</sup> The foreigner—for example, the Maskil who reads the Hassidic tale—deconstructs and undermines, by his violence as a stranger, the violence toward the magic by the form of the Hassidic tale. Since “the abuse of writing is a political abuse,”<sup>58</sup> we should ask, “How can we deny the practice of writing in general to a society capable of obliterating the proper, that is to say a violent society? For writing, obliteration of the proper, classed in the play of difference, is the originary violence itself.”<sup>59</sup>

The reading of the form of the Hassidic tale includes, as in a reading of any text, a point of self-reflexivity (as in many Hassidic tales, the tale begins with reflection on the very act of telling, “There was also an occurrence [tale] when there was no rain” (גם היה מעשה שהיו צריכים לגשם), so that “any narrative is primarily the allegory of its own reading.”<sup>60</sup> So, reading the form of the materiality of the magic is an act of self-reflexivity, which includes what can be characterized by Hegel’s words in his *Logic*: “But Form, being a complete whole of characteristics, *ipso facto* involves reflection-into-self; in other words, as self-relating Form it has the very function attributed to Matter.”<sup>61</sup>

Since the form of the Hassidic tale is sacred, not only does it require the narrator to tell about the Tzaddik’s magical act, but also the very act of the storytelling of the sacred form requires the actual implementation of the magical act. And as Theodor Adorno formulated it in *Negative Dialectics*, “we found that in the long run the content of a work of art stands judged by its form, and that it is the realized form of the work which offers the surest key to the vital possibility of that determinate social moment from which it springs.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 109.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 139–40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>60</sup> De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> W. G. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s “Logic,”* trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1975), 185.

<sup>62</sup> Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 55.

From this relation between the form of the tale and the “reality effect” of the magic that is represented by the tale, it is clear that basically we are dealing here with the practicing of the form as a political act.

Following what Marx wrote in 1845 in his well-known eleventh thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach—“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”<sup>63</sup>—it is clear that we are dealing with the reading of the form of the Hassidic tale as a political act. By Marx’s theses we can trace the materiality of the form of the Hassidic tale as a reading practice of a switch from a false concept, the form, to a true concept of reality (that exposes “God” as a product of a false consciousness) which is conducted as a real action, the real magic act, that transforms the materiality of the Hassidic tale into a political act. But Marx, who accused Feuerbach of not grasping “the significance of ‘revolutionary,’ of ‘practical-critical,’ activity,” refers to the materiality of the form in the first thesis: “The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the **form** of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively” (emphases added).<sup>64</sup>

Critical materialistic (and not contemplative) reading of the Hassidic tale as a form of practice makes clear that the materialistic magic act is a product of the tale’s form. This again can be deduced from Marx’s seventh thesis, where he declares that “Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the ‘religious sentiment’ is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular **form** of society.”<sup>65</sup>

Hence, the social intersubjectivity of the language of the tale creates the individual who conducts the magic as a dependent of the structure and the form of the literary language.

The telling of the Hassidic tale is therefore a magical act, which, by being a form of material and nonfictional ritual, bestows upon the storyteller divine authority as a partner in the creation of the world. And indeed, following Lurianic Kabbalah, Hassidism saw in the Hassidic tale a theurgic act of repairing of the divine after its cosmic shattering. The sparks of holiness that were scattered in their material form following the shattering of the divine await the Hassidic tale to gather and elevate them from the Kelipot and return them to their divine place.<sup>66</sup>

As a political act, the Hassidic tale cancels out the opposition between the act of the tale as a magical deed and the fact that it tells about a magical deed. This is a collapse of the statement (*énoncé*) into the act of stating the statement (*énonciation*), in which the literary form of the Besht’s wondrous narrative is in itself the magical act that brings about the rainfall. This collapse happens in a very singular moment of a revelation that stops the theological temporality of the literary form that is so essential in Lukács’s theory of the form. Indeed, the form of the tale “The Besht’s Prayer Produces Rain” reaches fulfillment in the final words, “‘Tell the gentile that it will rain today.’ **And so it did.**” The tale’s end states the fact that the rain did indeed fall as a direct result of the Besht’s prayer, a closure of the smoothed temporality of the magical form in which its authority is not open to dispute. By this it covers the gap in the narrative of the magic where there is no confidence that the deeds of the Besht will yield the successful result of rainfall.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. (emphasis added).

<sup>66</sup> Yosef Dan, *Ha-sipur ha-Hasidi* [The Hassidic Tale] (Jerusalem: Ketter, 1975), 46–58. For a different perspective, one that prefers the magic model of the theurgic, see Idel, *Hasidism*, 1995.



The politics of the Hassidic tale's form is conducted in what Jacques Rancière calls "the aesthetic regime of art," and it is within this framework that the Hassidic tale situates itself politically in the aesthetic fracturing of its form, which creates a dissensus between its sensory presentation, on the one hand, and how it is understood, on the other: "The ground of political action: certain subjects that do not count create a common polemical scene where they put into contention the objective status of what is 'given' and impose an examination and discussion of those things that were not 'visible,' that were not accounted for."<sup>67</sup>

The political magical act of the miraculous process that is represented in the Hassidic tale generates a mismatch between the sensory performance of the Tzaddik's actions in their own right, on the one hand, and the immanent invisible intervention of the divine which produces the miracle, on the other hand. This mismatch is formed in a temporal continuity that makes the magical connection between the magical act's cause and its effect an obvious phenomenon.

All this is right regarding the Hassidic audience. For them there is no conflict between the Tzaddik sacred and magic act and the magic effect produced by the intervention of the immanent divinity. But the response of the Maskilic audience could be very different. The political effect for them could be oppressive, exactly as Rancière's conception of the political predicts. As believers in God but as opponents of the Hassidic worship of the Tzaddik, they receive the Hassidic tale with a dissensus between, on the one hand, the sensory presentation of the Tzaddik's magic act and, on the other, their understanding of the invisible God's intervention in reality. By their resistant reading, the Maskilim deconstruct the Hassidic hagiographic political theology that places the Tzaddik as a magician whose success relies on the continuation of theocratic divine authority.

It is important to emphasize that for the Hassidic addressee the Hassidic tale is a true event that tells about a true object that, using Lukács's words, is "least verifiable." When he writes about the least verifiability of truth (in the tale, "The tax collector said that the truth..."), Lukács means authenticity which relies on a common interpretation by the closed and particularistic Hassidic community and which stands in contrast to Maskilic literature, whose fictionality is based on abstract and universal imagined readers. The Hassidic interpretation of the truth of the magic is conditioned by the closed community of addressees; for them, "actions which are never repeated cannot be called magical. If the whole community does not believe in the efficacy of the group of actions, they cannot be magical."<sup>68</sup>

This Hassidic least verifiability enables the political dissensus between the Maskilic defiant reading of the magic act of the Tzaddik and his understanding of the divine contribution to the rainfall. This dissensus is a product of the allegorical reading of the textualized form, which, according to de Man, is always the misreading of the literal narrative form as figurative (referring to something different from itself). The reason for this is that allegories of reading "are always allegories of the impossibility of reading,"<sup>69</sup> which are responsible for the dissensus in which the Maskilic reader does not accept without questioning the unity between the sacred magic acts of the Tzaddik and that of the divinity. This is a clear example of the impossibility of Maskilic reading the Hassidic tale as hagiography. This metonymic distinction between the Tzaddik and the divinity is a product of a failure of reading that entails the failure of the Hassidic tale as a hagiography.

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<sup>67</sup> "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (2000): 125.

<sup>68</sup> Mauss, *General Theory of Magic*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 205.

Scholars of folklore wrote about the instability of the form of genres of folklore whether in oral or in written literature. Form for them “is a metacommunicative strategy for making a claim that a text or performance belongs to a particular category.”<sup>70</sup> They deal with this form by comparing it to literary forms, and with respect to instability, it is worth referring to Galit Hasan-Rokem, who “addresses genre not for classificatory purposes but to show how genre is engaged in interpretation [and] insists on genre as intertextual, dialogic, and therefore, of necessity, unstable, even as it reveals conventions for interpretation.”<sup>71</sup>

The failure of the Hassidic tale genre form is a product of misreading of the literal connection between the Tzaddik and God. This misreading undermines the presence of the divine in the Tzaddik’s deeds and by this defies the justification for praising the Tzaddik.

The failure of the praising according to the Maskilic reading is a failure of the closure of the Hassidic tale’s form. But unlike the Maskilic reader, who identifies the Tzaddik as a political agent and feels toward him a deep political defiance, for the Hassidic reader there is no distinction between the *énoncé* and the *énonciation*, or between the content of the tale and its action, that is, the way it is understood and the way it is received sensually, and he reads, listens to, and enjoys the Hassidic tale as a hagiography without any criticism or defiance.

For the Hassidic addressee there is no distinction between the content of the tale that represents the magic act of the prayer and the tale itself as a magic act. On this matter it is important to quote Rabbi Nachman of Braslav, who said about the Besht that he was able to “effect mystical unifications through a wonder tale. [But w]hen he saw that a supernal channel was broken, and it was not possible to repair it through prayer, he would fix and connect them by means of a wonder tale.”<sup>72</sup>

A symptomatic Maskilic reading of the Hassidic tale’s form as a political act emphasizes the conflict between magic, which is a human act demonstrating supernatural power, and miracle, which is God’s intervention into nature. The knowledge that magic derives from the power that comes from God depends on the Hassidic theology of immanentism with respect to the spiritual energy, Shefa, flowing from God to the Tzaddik, who was perceived as a conduit that connects God with the Hassidic community.<sup>73</sup> The Tzaddik himself and his sacred language are “the channel through which the divine grace flows.”<sup>74</sup>

The prayer of the Besht as the ultimate Tzaddik is a vehicle to create the miraculous deed and to connect the Hassidim and God by aiding their prayer to reach God: “The all doctrine is based on the idea that in the Kabbalah the term Zaddik refers to the Sefirah Yesod (‘Foundation’) which, in the anthropomorphic symbolism favoured by the Kabbalah, is represented in the human body by the organ of generation. It is through Yesod that the unification of Tiferet and Malkhut takes place. Consequently, the Tzaddik on earth, as he offers his prayers, and especially as he leads the congregation in prayer, represents his special aspect of divine flow of grace, the flow into the Shekinah (= Malkhut) from Tiferet.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Amy Shuman and Galit Hasan-Rokem, “The Poetics of Folklore,” in Bendix and Hasan-Rokem, *Companion to Folklore*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–62.

<sup>72</sup> Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 230.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., the teaching of Rabbi Yosef Yaakov from Polonoy; Nigal, *Hasidic Tale*, 53–54.

<sup>74</sup> Jacob, *Hasidic Prayer*, 129; and Idel, *Hasidism*, 189–207.

<sup>75</sup> Jacob, *Hasidic Prayer*, 127.

And here this theology stands in contradiction to the textualization of the Hassidic tale, which actually signifies the contradiction between the godly miracle and the Tzaddik's magic. Following de Man, we can speak about the dissensus between the Tzaddik's magic act and the Maskilic knowledge about the real divine intervention as a direct product of the textuality of the narrative form. The rhetoric of the very act of narration by the self of the storyteller creates "the Self as the relentless undoer of selfhood,"<sup>76</sup> which deconstructs the self of the storyteller. This rhetoric, the form, deconstructs the magic narrative, which creates a political distinction between these two textualized magic-connected events.

The Hassidic tale itself is a sacred act, a kind of a magic act that narrates and represents a miracle. This is exactly Lukács's concept of the literary form as a repetition of the act of telling. This repetition is conducted over time and creates a kind of allegorical reflexivity that by the same token discovers the historical reality and makes visible the gap between it and the tale as a literary representation. According to this we can say that the figure of the Tzaddik is an allegory for the figure of God, but it vacillates between its positioning as truth and the religious defiance against an allegory of this sort. The moment when this figurative formal vacillation ceases is the decisive Hassidic political moment in which the reader gives in to a moment of true revelation of the magical act by the literary form of the Hassidic tale. The politics of the miracle's form represented by the Hassidic tale does not differentiate between fiction and reality but rather generates the "real" of the Hassidic community as a theocracy that, through the revelation, emphasizes the synecdochic relationship (*pars pro toto*) between the Tzaddik (as a man of flesh and blood held captive by the senses), who performs a magical act, and God (the meaning of that which is captured by the senses), who intervenes in the world as a real force and produces the miracle in it. This "rhetoric of the real" creates the political effect of the Hassidic tale by the dissensus of its form.

This kind of dissensus works in a very effective way in the literary language of the Hassidic tale. In contrast to the Maskilic literary language, which was committed to a biblical purism, the Hassidic literary language is full of nonnormative Hebrew syntax, morphology, and semantics. The Hassidic tale is also a product of a non-diglossic linguistic situation that moves smoothly between Hebrew and Yiddish. It can be viewed, as by Dan Miron, as a "bi-lingual Jewish literature, whose essential character was non- or almost non-diglossic, namely, a literature in which the two Jewish languages functioned within a framework where the high-low sharply etched binarism became blurry and diffuse."<sup>77</sup> The language of the Hassidic tale refuses to commit itself to a diglossic distinction between these two Jewish languages in which Hebrew is used only for sacred purposes and Yiddish is used in daily, secular situations.

The main apparatus of this diglossic Hebrew-Yiddish linguistic situation in the Hassidic tale is the loan translation: the calque.<sup>78</sup> In our tale we have a fine example where the Besht says to the tax collector: תשלח להסביבה שיבואו לכאן למנין.<sup>79</sup> The expression תשלח להסביבה (Send for the Jews in the surrounding area) is a calque, a literal loan translation of the Yiddish expression ארום שיקין גאר די סביבה.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 173.

<sup>77</sup> Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 279.

<sup>78</sup> Lily Kahn, *A Grammar of the Eastern European Hasidic Hebrew Tale* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 391–93.

<sup>79</sup> Grözinger, *Die Geschichten vom Ba'al Schem Tov*, vol. 1, 33.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 28.

The calque creates a linguistic effect of blurring and subversion that acts as a “Minor Literature,” which according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari creates a literary deterritorialization in the language of the “Major Literature,” which in the case of the Haskalah is the Hebrew language of the imagined Hebrew state in biblical times and also the Maskilic Hebrew that was developed under and in relation to the empires.<sup>81</sup> The most famous early Maskilic literary text that was written in pure biblical language is *Shirei tif'eret* (1782–1802) by Naphtali Hirtz Wessely (1725–1805), and a later, also famous text is Avraham Mapu's (1808–67) *Love of Zion* (1853). The Maskilic Hebrew poems that glorified Napoleon and the Austro-Hungarian caesar are fine examples of the subordination of Hebrew to the empires.

Here is the place to mention the limits of the structuralist theory of diglossia, which insists that the loan translation is always a compensation for the lack of a term in one language that forces the retrieval of a term from another language.<sup>82</sup> This functionalism misses the aesthetic dissensus of the literary language of the Hassidic tale. Instead of harmony between the two languages, Hebrew and Yiddish, what we get in the Hassidic tale is an effect of blurring and disobedience to the norms of the biblical hegemonic language of the Haskalah. It is a vivid example of the Hassidic politics of provocation that is aimed at the literary language and the literary tradition of the Hebrew Haskalah and that basically promotes Hassidic literature as a vibrant and powerful alternative to it. This Hebrew cultural politics agenda means that what we really have here is a non-diglossic language in a literary situation that conducts a Hassidic conservative politics of survival and self-defense that refrains from any Jewish nationalistic utopia. A

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<sup>81</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>82</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, “Le’berur mahuta ve’tafkida shel leshon ha’sifrut ba-diglossia” [The Nature and Functionalization of the Language of Literature Under Diglossia,] *Ha’sifrut* 2, no. 2 (1970): 286–302.